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Review of *Reopening the Frontier: Homesteading in the Modern West* by Brian Q. Cannon

Mark Engler

Homestead National Monument of America

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Reopening the Frontier: Homesteading in the Modern West. By Brian Q. Cannon. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. viii + 307 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.

FREE LAND was the Cry! For 123 years the Homestead Act provided millions of people the opportunity to pursue the American Dream of land ownership. Moreover, it had a tremendous impact beyond individual people or families, profoundly changing the nation and the world.

Brian Q. Cannon's *Reopening the Frontier: Homesteading in the Modern West* is one of several recent titles exploring America's epic homesteading story. Within Cannon's book readers will find events tying back to the early years of the homestead movement that have been repeated time and again. While one may believe that modern homesteading between 1946 and 1966 would be distinctly different from those experiences encountered during homesteading's early years, Cannon finds common threads—as well as striking differences. Above all, he declares, “the land has always pandered to Americans' dreams.”

Cannon examines in great detail the Homestead program, administered by the Bureau of Reclamation, during the post–World War II period, providing insight into the evolution of the Homestead Act and the government's role in ensuring the success of these latter-day homesteading farmers. His research also

leads to a discussion of the end of America's homesteading era, including the identity of America's last homesteader, and offers insight into the thinking and politics involved in the Homestead Act's demise.

Introduced as well is the battle over water as homesteaders, working to fulfill their dreams, clashed with others over water and efforts to save endangered species like the Lost River sucker and shortnose sucker. Cannon lets readers see why one farm family, from the Klamath Basin in Oregon, claimed their homesteading experience went “from a dream to a nightmare.”

The Homestead Act was repealed in the lower forty-eight states in 1976, but extended in Alaska for an additional ten years. Cannon reminds us that the homestead idea continues to be alive and well. He introduces us to local communities that are offering government-owned land to a new generation in search of the American Dream. Like the original Homestead Act, these land-granting programs can promote economic growth and community pride.

Cannon's study reiterates why the Homestead Act of 1862 was one of the most significant of the nation's laws and how it continues to be a symbol of egalitarian opportunity.

MARK ENGLER

Homestead National Monument of America
Beatrice, Nebraska